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SUBJECT: Behind the Scenes in Chile's Presidential Campaigns: Frei Camp Tired, Pinera Team Salivating, Enriquez-Ominami Keeps Everyone Guessing

REF: SANTIAGO 867; SANTIAGO 126; SANTIAGO 304

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CLASSIFIED BY: Carol Urban, DCM, State Department, US Embassy Santiago; REASON: 1.4(B)

¶1. (C) Summary: While the Eduardo Frei presidential campaign focuses its public attacks on Alianza candidate Sebastian Pinera, private conversations reveal that Frei's team is increasingly worried about upstart leftist challenger Marco Enriquez-Ominami. Both the energized Pinera team and the tired Frei campaign are counting votes--with the Frei folks just hoping that their man can survive as a credible candidate into the second round. Enriquez-Ominami has been coy about who he will endorse in the second round, so speculation abounds as to how many of his voters each campaign could capture. End Summary.

Frei Camp: Worried about Enriquez-Ominami

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¶2. (C) Despite a long-standing strategy of largely ignoring Marco Enriquez-Ominami and directing their fire at Sebastian Pinera, private conversations with Frei advisors make it clear that the former filmmaker has supplanted Pinera as the Frei campaign's most immediate worry. Earlier in the campaign, the young parliamentarian was simply a nuisance to be batted away while focusing on Pinera and the second round of the election. Now, Concertacion leaders are worried that their candidate will emerge so weak from the first round that a second round victory will be out of reach.

¶3. (C) The Frei campaign has pinned its hopes for resurgence on its extensive network of political activists across the country. However, Senator Jorge Burgos, who was initially tapped to coordinate the nationwide mobilization, failed to step up to the plate, putting mobilization efforts behind schedule. Senator Jorge Pizarro has been tapped to fill this role, and appears to be much more active. In contrast to Frei, Alianza and Concertacion analysts say that Enriquez-Ominami has little support infrastructure outside of Santiago and few strong congressional candidates to campaign for him. Enriquez-Ominami's challenge is to extend his base of support beyond urban young people to older voters and rural areas, and his team seems poorly prepared to do so.

14. (C) The Frei campaign seems to be embodying the opposition refrain that the Concertacion is "agotada" (worn out) after twenty years of continuous rule. In meetings with Emboffs, key Frei advisors have been surprisingly detached from the fate of the election. While on the one hand expressing confidence that a Frei win is possible, they show little enthusiasm for actually making it happen. During a Sept. 28 lunch with E/Pol Chief and Poloff, Frei communication strategist Eugenio Tironi seemed content to sit back and watch as the Pinera camp transformed Frei's accusations of insider trading into a referendum on the NGO that issued the report (ref A). Frei's daughter, Magdalena Frei, was equally dispassionate in discussing her role in the campaign, divisions within the Concertacion, and Pinera's success. Recent conversations with other Frei advisors have been similarly flat.

15. (C) The Frei team is also suffering from another malaise--the revolving door. Key campaign officials have been named, sidelined, and replaced frequently over the past several months. Unknown 27-year-old NGO official Sebastian Bowen was brought in as campaign director in April (as 36-year-old Enriquez-Ominami's campaign was taking off) to create excitement and youth appeal in the campaign, but was quickly sidelined. Senator Jorge Burgos then appeared as

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the senior advisor in the command, effectively replacing Bowen. However Burgos failed in a subsequent role--coordinating nationwide campaign efforts--and has now been supplanted by Senator Jorge Pizarro. And on October 19, two figures very close to President Bachelet--her mother, Angela Jeria, and Women's Affairs Minister Laura Albornoz--announced that they will be joining the Frei team, a transparent effort to transfer some of Bachelet's popularity to Frei.

16. (C) In contrast to the apathetic and laissez-faire attitudes on the Frei side, Pinera's supporters seem to be energized and united by their best chance in 20 years to win the presidency. Alianza's fragile coalition between the centrist and more secular Renovacion Nacional (RN) and the devoutly Catholic and staunchly conservative Independent Democratic Union (UDI) has been deeply fragmented in the past. (Note: Indeed, Pinera himself has been an important agent of division. In 2005, Pinera and his Renovacion Nacional party reneged on an agreement to support Joaquin Lavin, the UDI mayor of Santiago, as Alianza's presidential candidate after Lavin's campaign lost steam. Pinera entered the presidential race in May 2005, squeaked past Lavin for a second place finish in the first round elections, and then lost to Bachelet. End Note.) Today, Renovacion Nacional partisans dominate Pinera's campaign while UDI politicians offer varying levels of explicit support, or at least stifle any criticism they may have. The UDI seems to have decided that it is better to support Pinera now and demand top jobs and influence over key policy decisions later in a potential Pinera administration, rather than hurt Pinera's chances through public disagreement. Tironi and Magdalena Frei also groused that Pinera can enforce Alianza unity because he is personally providing significant funding to many Alianza congressional campaigns.

Who Has the Votes?

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¶7. (U) Many political analysts and campaign advisors had high hopes that this year's presidential campaign, with its theme of change and a 36-year-old presidential candidate, would inspire many of Chile's 4 million unregistered voters to officially join the voter rolls. However, only 200,000 previously unregistered Chileans registered to vote--fewer than in the run up to the last presidential election--leaving one-third of voting age Chileans (and more than three-quarters of those under 30) unregistered. (Note: Voter registration in Chile is voluntary, but every registered voter is legally obligated to vote in each election. End Note.) Thus, the voting pool remains largely the same as it was 20 years ago (Ref B) and the strong advantage that Pinera showed among unregistered voters has lost any importance.

¶8. (C) Not surprisingly, Frei and Pinera camps offer different analyses of how first and second round voting is likely to unfold. Key Frei advisors tell us that their candidate must remain within 10 percentage points of Pinera in the first round in order to have a shot at winning the second round. Early September's well-respected CEP poll showed Frei nine points behind Pinera, and more recent polls -- while not as reliable -- suggest that Frei is losing ground. Frei confidante and campaign insider Belasario Velasco offered Poloff a typically mixed Concertacion message about Frei's chances in the first round. After beginning with the admission that "Today, nothing is clear," Velasco went on to predict that while Pinera would be far in front in the first round, Frei would maintain a solid lead over Enriquez-Ominami. Velasco envisions that the December 13 results will yield 40% for Pinera, 33% for Frei, 17-18% for Enriquez-Ominami, and 3-4% for leftist Jorge Arrate.

¶9. (C) The Pinera team, confident that its candidate will have a strong showing in the first round, have focused its prognostication efforts on the runoff vote in January. Pinera campaign director Rodrigo Hinzpeter opined that few of the 45% of voters who supported Pinera in the second round election in January 2006 (when he lost to Bachelet) would abandon him now. If he can just add 5%

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more, he'll win, Hinzpeter effused. Moreover, a sizeable portion--perhaps 35%--of Enriquez-Ominami's voters may cross over to the right and vote for Pinera in the second round, he said. (Note: An August poll shows that 46% of Enriquez-Ominami's first round votes would likely go to Frei in the second round, with 30% headed to Pinera, and the rest undecided. End Note.) For his part, Enriquez-Ominami has been coy about how he will play his cards as the presidential race unfolds. He was quoted in the Argentine press in September as saying that he would not vote for Frei in a run-off election but later deftly deflected criticism by saying that he expected to make it to the second round himself, and hoped to win Frei's vote there.

What's Next for Enriquez-Ominami?

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¶10. (C) Political analysts seem mystified by the Enriquez-Ominami phenomenon--surprised that he has done so well and unsure of what his goals are now given his success. (Mainstream political analysts take it as a given that Enriquez-Ominami has no chance of achieving the presidency in this election.) Early in the campaign, conventional wisdom was that Enriquez-Ominami was positioning himself for a senatorial candidacy and/or warming up for a more serious presidential run in 2013. If winning a senate seat had been Enriquez-Ominami's original goal, he has been a victim of his own success. The congressman grew so popular so quickly that accepting a senate candidacy back in July or August when the lists were being defined would have seemed like a step backward.

¶11. (C) A 2013 presidential bid may be in Enriquez-Ominami's future, but he faces many obstacles. His nascent political movement has attracted many admirers but relatively few well-connected political leaders. Enriquez-Ominami and his father, Senator Carlos Ominami, may fade from view as neither are likely to have prominent political positions that would keep them in the public eye. (Enriquez-Ominami is not running for re-election to the Chamber of Deputies and his father, a former Socialist party member, will likely to lose his Senate seat to a Concertacion candidate. Enriquez-Ominami is unlikely to pursue a post in either a Frei or Pinera administration given his rhetoric against continued Concertacion rule and political distance from Alianza.) Given Enriquez-Ominami's likely challenges in maintaining his stature and momentum after this year's election, a 2013 run might mean starting over.

¶12. (C) Comment: Frei's campaign is struggling, and even his key advisors seem half-hearted in their efforts to present an enthusiastic facade or turn the tide of the election. After twenty years in power, the ideological unity of the Concertacion is fraying badly, and many politicians are finding it more attractive to set out on their own--either via their own presidential bids or independent congressional campaigns-- than to back the establishment figure. Marco Enriquez-Ominami is the most recent and most important breakaway figure, but is not the first: PRSD president Jose Antonio Gomez (Ref C), Chavista Alejandro Navarro, and leftist candidate Jorge Arrate are all current or former Concertacion politicians who have challenged Frei while Sebastian Pinera enjoyed a stress-free coronation as the Alianza candidate. A combination of twenty years of longing and the purse strings of their presidential candidate may be keeping Alianza together now, but many suggest that the coalition's fractures would re-emerge if Pinera wins the presidency. End Comment.

SIMONS